

Characters

- Hoss
- Becky Lou
- Star-Man
- Galactic Jack
- Referee
- Cheyenne
- Doc
- Crow

Act 1

ACT ONE

SCENE: *A bare stage except for an evil-looking black chair with silver studs and a very high back, something like an Egyptian Pharaoh's throne but simple, centre stage. In the dark, heavy lurking Rock and Roll starts low and builds as the lights come up. The band should be hidden. The sound should be like "Heroin" by the Velvet Underground. When the lights are up full, HOSS enters in black rocker gear with silver studs and black kid gloves. He holds a microphone. He should look like a mean Rip Torn but a little younger. He takes the stage and sings "The Way Things Are." The words of the song should be understood so the band has to back off on volume when he starts singing.*

"The Way Things Are"

HOSS

You may think every picture you see is a true history of the way things used to be or the way things are
While you're ridin' in your radio or walkin' through the late late show ain't it a drag to know you just don't
know you just don't know

So here's another illusion to add to your confusion Of the way things are

Everybody's doin' time for everybody else's crime and I can't swim for the waves in the ocean

All the heroes is dyin' like flies they say it's a sign a' the times

And everybody's walkin' asleep eyes open — eyes open

So here's another sleep-walkin' dream

A livin' talkin' show of the way things seem

I used to believe in rhythm and blues

Always wore my blue suede shoes

New everything I do goes down in doubt

But sometimes in the blackest night I can see a little light That's the only thing that keeps me rockin' — keeps
me rockin'

So here's another fantasy

About the way things seem to be to me.

(He finishes the song and throws down the microphone and yells off stage.)

BECKY Lou!

(BECKY comes on in black rock and roll gear. She's very tall and blonde. She holds two black satchels, one in each hand. They should look like old country-doctor bags.)

BECKY LOU

Ready just about.

HOSS

Let's have a look at the gear.

(BECKY sets the bags down on the floor and opens them. She pulls out a black velvet piece of cloth and lays it carefully on the floor then begins to take out pearl-handled revolvers, pistols, derringers and rifles with scopes, shotguns broken down. All the weapons should look really beautiful and clean. She sets them carefully on the velvet cloth. HOSS pick up the rifles and handles them like a pro, cocking them and looking down the barrel through the scope, checking out the chambers on the pistols and running his hands over them as though they were alive.)

How's the Maserati?

BECKY LOU

Clean. Greased like a bullet. Cheyenne took it up to 180 on the Ventura Freeway then backed her right down. Said she didn't bark once.

HOSS

Good. About time he stopped them quarter-mile orgasms. They were rippin' her up. Gotta let the gas flow in a machine like that. She's Italian. Likes a full-tilt feel.

BECKY LOU

Cheyenne's hungry for long distance now. Couldn't hold him back with nails. Got lead in his gas foot.

HOSS

These look nice and blue. Did the Jeweler check 'em out?

BECKY LOU

Yeah, Hoss. Everything's taken care of.

HOSS

Good. Now we can boogie.

BECKY LOU

What's the moon chart say?

HOSS

Don't ask me! I hired a fucking star-man. A gazer. What the fuck's he been doin' up there.

BECKY LOU

I don't know. Last I knew it was the next first quarter moon. That's when he said things'd be right.

HOSS

Get that fucker down here! I wanna see him. I gave him thirteen grand to get this chart in line. Tell him to get his ass down here!

BECKY LOU

O`K`, O`K`

(She exits, HOSS caresses the guns.)

HOSS

That fuckin' Scorpion's gonna crawl if this gets turned around now. Now is right. I can feel it's right. I need the points! Can't they see that! I'm winning in three fucking States! I'm controlling more borders than any a' them punk Markers. The El Camino Boys. Bunch a' fuckin' punks. GET THAT FUCKER DOWN HERE!!!

(STAR-MAN enters with BECKY. He's dressed in silver but shouldn't look like Star Trek, more contemporary silver.)

O`K`, slick face, what's the scoop. Can we move now?

STAR-MAN

Pretty risky, Hoss.

HOSS

I knew it! I knew it! You fuckin' creep! Every time we get hot to trot you throw on the ice water. Whatsa matter now.

STAR-MAN

Venus is entering Scorpio.

HOSS

I don't give a shit if it's entering Brigitte Bardot. I'm ready for a kill!

STAR-MAN

You'll blow it.

HOSS

I'll blow it. What do you know. I've always moved on a sixth sense. I don't need you, meatball.

BECKY LOU

Hoss, you never went against the charts before.

HOSS

Fuck before. This time I feel it. I can smell blood. It's right. The time is right! I'm fallin' behind. Maybe you don't understand that.

STAR-MAN

Not true, Hoss. The El Caminos are about six points off the pace. Mojo Root Force is the only one close enough to even worry about.

HOSS

Mojo? That fruit? What'd he knock over?

STAR-MAN

Vegas, Hoss. He rolled the big one.

HOSS

Vegas! He can't take Vegas, that's my mark! That's against the code!

STAR-MAN

He took it.

HOSS

I don't believe it.

BECKY LOU

We picked it up on the bleeper.

HOSS

When? How come I'm the last to find out?

STAR-MAN

We thought it'd rattle you too much.

HOSS

When did it happen!

STAR-MAN

This morning from what the teleprompters read.

HOSS

I'm gonna get that chump. I'm gonna have him. He can't do that. He knew Vegas was on my ticket. He's trying to shake me. He thinks I'll just jump borders and try suburban shots. Well he's fuckin' crazy. I'm gonna roll him good.

BECKY LOU

You can't go against the code, Hoss. Once a Marker strikes and sets up colors, that's his turf. You can't strike claimed turf. They'll throw you out of the game.

HOSS

He did it! He took my mark. It was on my ticket, goddamnit!

STAR-MAN

He can just claim his wave system blew and he didn't find out till too late.

HOSS

Well he's gonna find out now. I'll get a fleet together and wipe him out.

BECKY LOU

But, Hoss, you'll be forced to change class. You won't have solo rights no more. You'll be a gang man. A punk.

HOSS

I don't care. I want that fuckin' gold record and nobody's gonna stop me. Nobody!

STAR-MAN

You gotta hold steady, Hoss. This is a tender time. The wrong move'll throw you back a year or more. You can't afford that now. The charts are moving too fast. Every week there's a new star. You don't wanna be a fly-by-night mug in the crowd. You want something durable, something lasting. How're you gonna cop an immortal shot if you give up soloing and go into a gang war. They'll rip you up in a night. Sure you'll have a few moments of global glow, maybe even an interplanetary flash. But it won't last, Hoss, it won't last.

BECKY LOU

He's right, Hoss.

HOSS

O'K', O'K' I'm just gettin' hungry that's all. I need a kill. I haven't had a kill for months now. You know what that's like. I gotta kill. It's my whole life. If I don't kill I get crazy. I start eating away at myself. It's not good. I was born to kill.

STAR-MAN

Nobody knows that better than us, Hoss. But you gotta listen to management. That's what we're here for. To advise and direct. Without us you'd be just like a mad dog again. Can't you remember what that was like.

HOSS

Yeah, yeah! Go away now. Go on! I wanna be alone with Becky.

STAR-MAN

O'K' Just try and take it easy. I know you were wired for a big kill but your time is coming. Don't forget that.

HOSS

Yeah, all right. Beat it!

(STAR-MAN exits leaving HOSS alone with BECKY. He looks around the stage dejected. He kicks at the guns and pulls off his gloves.)

I'm too old fashioned. That's it. Gotta kick out the scruples. Go against the code. That's what they used to do. The big ones. Dylan, Jagger, Townsend. All them cats broke codes. Time can't change that.

BECKY LOU

But they were playin' pussy, Hoss. They weren't killers ... You're a killer, man. You're in the big time.

HOSS

So were they. My Pa told me what it was like. They were killers in their day too. Cold killers.

BECKY LOU

Come on. You're talkin' treason against the game. You could get the slammer for less than that.

HOSS

Fuck 'em. I know my power. I can go on Gypsy Kill and still gain status. There's a whole underground movement going on. There's a lot of Gypsy Markers comin' up.

BECKY LOU

Why do you wanna throw everything away. You were always suicidal like that. Right from the start.

HOSS

It's part of my nature.

BECKY LOU

That's what we saved you from, your nature. Maybe you forgot that. When we first landed you, you were a complete beast of nature. A sideways killer. Then we molded and shaped you and sharpened you down to

perfection because we saw in you a true genius killer. A killer to end them all. A killer's killer.

HOSS

Aw fuck off. I don't believe that shit no more. That stuff is for schoolies. Sure I'm good. I might even be great but I ain't no genius. Genius is something outside the game. The game can't contain a true genius. It's too small. The next genius is gonna be a Gypsy Killer. I can feel it. I know it's goin' down right now. We don't have the whole picture. We're too successful ... We're insulated from what's really happening by our own fame.

BECKY LOU

You're really trying to self-destruct aren't you? Whatsa matter, you can't take fame no more? You can't hold down the pressure circuits? Maybe you need a good lay or two.

HOSS

Your ass. I can handle the image like a fuckin' jockey. It's just that I don't trust the race no more. I dropped the blinkers.

BECKY LOU

You're not gettin' buck fever are ya'?

HOSS

Get outa' here!

BECKY LOU

Come on. Put it in fourth for a while, Hoss. Cruise it. You can afford to take it easy.

HOSS

GET THE FUCK OUTA' HERE!!!

BECKY LOU

O`K`, O`K` I'm your friend. Remember?

HOSS

Yeah, sure.

BECKY LOU

I am. You're in a tough racket. The toughest. But now ain't the time to crack. You're knockin' at the door, Hoss. You gotta hold on. Once you get the gold then you can back off. But not now.

HOSS

I'm not backin' off. I'm just havin' a doubt dose.

BECKY LOU

Maybe I should call a D'J' One a' the big ones. Then you could sit down with him and he could lay the chart out right in front of you. Show you exactly where you stand.

HOSS

That's a good idea. Good. Go get one. Get Galactic Jack and his Railroad Track. Tell him to bring his latest charts. Go on!

BECKY LOU

O'K' I'll be back.

(She exits. HOSS stalks around the stage building up his confidence.)

HOSS

She's right! She's right goddamnit! I'm so fucking close. Knockin' at the door. I can't chicken out of it now. This is my last chance. I'm gettin' old. I can't do a Lee Marvin in the late sixties. I can't pull that number off. I've stomped too many heads. I'm past shitkicker class now. Past the rumble. I'm in the big time. Really big. It's now or never. Come on, Hoss, be a killer, man. Be a killer!

(Music starts. He sings "Cold Killer.")

"Cold Killer"

I'm a cold killer Mama — I got blood on my jeans
I got a Scorpion star hangin' over me
I got snakes in my pockets and a razor in my boot
You better watch it don't get you — It's faster'n you can shoot
I got the fastest action in East L'A'

I got the fastest action in San Berdoo
And if you don't believe it lemme shoot it to you
Now watch me slide into power glide — supercharged down the line
There ain't no way for you to hide from the killer's eye
My silver studs, my black kid gloves make you cry inside
But there ain't no way for you to hide from the killer's eye
I'm a cold killer Mama — and I've earned my tattoo
I got a Pachooko cross hangin' over you
I got whiplash magic and a rattlesnake tongue
My John the Conqueroot says I'm the cold gun
Now watch me slide into power glide supercharged down the line
There ain't no way for you to hide from the killer's eye
My silver studs, my black kid gloves make you cry inside
But there ain't no way for you to hide from the killer's eye.

(The song ends. BECKY enters with GALACTIC JACK the disc jockey. He's white and dressed like a 42nd Street pimp, pink shirt, black tie, black patent leather shoes, white panama straw hat and a flash suit. He talks like Wolfman Jack and carries a bundle of huge charts.)

Ah! The man. Galactic Jack and his Railroad Track.

GALACTIC JACK

That's me, Jim. Heavy duty and on the whim. Back flappin', side trackin', finger poppin', reelin' rockin' with the tips on the picks in the great killer race. All tricks, no sale, no avail. It's in the can and on the lam. Grease it, daddyo!

(He holds out his hand palm up for HOSS to give him five. HOSS holds back.)

HOSS

Back down, Jack. Just give it me straight. Am I risin' or fallin'.

GALACTIC JACK

A shootin' star, baby. High flyin' and no jivin'. You is off to number nine.

HOSS

Show me what you got. Just lay it out on the floor.

BECKY LOU

Shall I get ya'll some drinks?

HOSS

Yeah. Tequila Gold. What do you take, Jack?

GALACTIC JACK

Not me, baby. I'm runnin' reds all down the spine. Feelin' fine and mixin's a crime.

BECKY LOU

Right.

(She exits. JACK lays his chart on the floor. HOSS and JACK crouch down to get a close inspection.)

GALACTIC JACK

O'K' Here's the stand on the national band. The game's clean now. Solo is the word. Gang war is takin' a back seat. The Low Riders are outa' the picture and you is in, Jim. In like a stone winner.

HOSS

Don't type it up, Jack. Just show me how it's movin'. I was ready to take Nevada clean and that meathead Mojo Root Force rolled Vegas.

GALACTIC JACK

Yeah I heard that. Supposed to be on your ticket too. Bad news.

HOSS

He can't get away with that can he?

GALACTIC JACK

I can't dope them sheets, Hoss. You'll have to consult a Ref for the rules or go straight to the Keepers.

HOSS

I can't go to the game Keepers. They'll ask for an itinerary and question past kills. I can't afford a penalty now. I need every point.

GALACTIC JACK

Well lookee here. There's movement all around but no numero uno. That's what they're backin' their chips on you for, boy. The bookies got you two to one.

HOSS

That close?

GALACTIC JACK

All of'em runnin' it down to you. There's Little Willard from the East in his formula Lotus. Fast machine. Doin' O'K' with a stainless steel Baretta.

HOSS

Willard's solo now?

GALACTIC JACK

Yeah but no threat. Just a front runner. Lots a' early speed but can't go the distance. Here's one outa Tupalo called Studie Willcock. Drivin' a hot Merc, dual cams, Chrysler through and through. Fast but not deadly. He's offered four in a week and almost had Arkansas wrapped up but he's fadin' fast. You're it, Jim. You is the coldest on the circuit.

HOSS

What about this mark?

(*pointing at the charts*)

GALACTIC JACK

Oh yeah, that's Grease Jam. Got a supercharged Mini Cooper. Takes the corners. Tried a hit on St' Paul and almost had Minnesota to its knees when he blew a head gasket. Some say he's even been offed by the El Caminos.

HOSS

Those guys are pressin' it pretty hard. They're gonna get blown off sooner or later.

GALACTIC JACK

No doubt. No need to pout. The course is clear.

Maybe a few Gypsy Killers comin' into the picture but nothin' to fret your set.

HOSS

Gypsies? Where? I knew it. I got a feeling.

GALACTIC JACK

Just some side bets. They go anonymous 'cause 'a the code. One slip and they is pissed. You can dig it. They's playin' with the king fire.

HOSS

But they got a following right? They're growing in the poles?

GALACTIC JACK

Hard to suss it yet, man. Some poles don't even mention their kills for fear of the Keepers comin' down on 'em. I could maybe sound some flies for ya'. See if I could whiff some sniff on that action.

HOSS

Yeah, do.

GALACTIC JACK

What's the keen to the Gypsy scene. These boys are losin' to the cruisin' baby.

HOSS

They've got time on their side. Can't you see that. The youth's goin' to 'em. The kids are flocking to Gypsy Kills. It's a market opening up, Jack. I got a feeling. I know they're on their way in and we're going out. We're gettin' old, Jack.

GALACTIC JACK

You just got the bugged blues, man. You been talkin' to the wrong visions. You gotta get a head set. Put yer ears on straight. Zoot yerself down, boy. These Gypsies is committin' suicide. We got the power. We got the game. If the Keepers whimsy it all they do is scratch 'em out. Simple. They're losers, man. The bookies don't even look past their left shoulder at a Gypsy Mark. They won't last, man. Believe me.

HOSS

I don't know. There's power there. Full blown.

GALACTIC JACK

They don't know the ropes, man. Rules is out. They're into slaughter straight off. Not a clean kill in the

bunch.

HOSS

But they got balls. They're on their own.

GALACTIC JACK

So are you. Solo's the payolo.

HOSS

But I'm inside and they're out. They could unseat us all.

GALACTIC JACK

Not a King. The crown sticks where it fits and right now it looks about your size.

HOSS

What if they turned the game against us. What if they started marking us!

GALACTIC JACK

That's revolution, man.

HOSS

You hit it.

GALACTIC JACK

Old time shuffle. Don't stand a chance at this dance.

HOSS

But that's how we started ain't it. We went up against the Dudes. Wiped 'em out.

GALACTIC JACK

The Dudes weren't pros, man. You gotta see where you stand. I do believe you is tastin' fear. Runnin' scared. These Gypsies is just muckrakers. Second hand, one night stand. They ain't worth shit on shinola in your league. Dig yourself on the flip side. You're number one with a bullet and you ain't even got the needle in the groove.

HOSS

We'll see. Somethin's goin' down big out there. The shit's gonna hit the fan before we can get to the bank.

GALACTIC JACK

Take a deep knee bend, Hoss. It's just the pre-victory shakes. Tomorrow you'll have the gold in your hand. The biggie. Don't be shy, I tell no lie. Catch ya' on the re-bop. Say bye and keep the slide greased down.

HOSS

Yeah. Thanks.

(JACK *collects his charts and exits*. HOSS *paces and talks to himself*.)

(*to himself*)

Come on, come on. Confidence, man. Confidence. Don't go on the skids now. Keep it together. Tighten down. Talk it out. Quit jumpin' at shadows. They got you goose bumped and they ain't even present. Put yourself in their place. They got nothin'. You got it all. All the chips. Come on dice! Come on dice! That's it. Roll 'em sweet. The sweet machine. Candy in the gas tank. Floor it. Now you got the wheel. Take it. Take it!

(BECKY *enters with the drink*. HOSS *catches himself*.)

BECKY LOU

What happened to Jack?

HOSS

We ran the session.

BECKY LOU

Here's your drink.

HOSS

Thanks. Listen, Becky, is Cheyenne ready to roll?

BECKY LOU

Yeah. He's hot. Why?

HOSS

Maybe we could just do a cruise. No action. Just some scouting. I'm really feelin' cooped up in here. This place is drivin' me nuts.

BECKY LOU

Too dangerous, Hoss. We just got word that Eyes sussed somebody's marked you.

HOSS

What! Marked *me*? Who?

BECKY LOU

One a' the Gypsies.

HOSS

It's all comin' down like I said. I must be top gun then.

BECKY LOU

That's it.

HOSS

They gotta be fools, man. A Gypsy's marked *me*?

BECKY LOU

That's the word from Eyes.

HOSS

Where is he?

BECKY LOU

Vegas.

HOSS

Vegas? Oh now I get it. Mojo. He's hired a Gypsy to off me clean. That's it. That fuckin' chicken shit. I'm gonna blast him good. Doesn't have the balls to come down to me. Gotta hire a Gypsy.

BECKY LOU

Might be just a renegade solo, Hoss. They're all lookin' to put you under. You're the main trigger. The word's out.

HOSS

Don't you get it? The Root Force is slip-streamin' my time. Takin' my marks and hirin' amateurs to rub me out. It's a gang shot. They're workin' doubles. I gotta team up now. It's down to that. I gotta get ahold a' Little Willard. Get him on the line.

BECKY LOU

Hoss, don't fly off, man. You're safe here.

HOSS

Safe! Safe and amputated from the neck down! I'm a Marker man, not a desk clerk. Get fucking Willard to the phone! And tell Cheyenne to come in here!

(BECKY *exits*)

O'K' Now the picture brightens. I can play for high stakes now. I can draw to the straight, outside or in. I'm ready to take on any a' these flash heads. Vegas is mine, man. It belongs in my pocket. The West is mine. I could even take on the Keepers. That's it. I'll live outside the fucking law altogether. Outside the whole shot.

That's it. Why didn't I think a' that before!

(CHEYENNE enters in green velvet with silver boots and racing gloves.)

CHEYENNE

You want me, Hoss?

HOSS

Yeah! Yeah I want you! You're my main man.

(He gives CHEYENNE a bear hug.)

Listen, Cheyenne, we done a lotta' marks in our time. Right?

CHEYENNE

Yeah.

HOSS

Good clean kills. Honest kills. But now the times are changin'. The race is deadly. Mojo Root Force is movin' in on turf marks and tryin' to put me out with a Gypsy.

CHEYENNE

A Gypsy?

HOSS

Yeah.

CHEYENNE

They can't do that. It's against the code.

HOSS

Fuck the code. Nobody's playin' by the rules no more. We been suckers to the code for too long now. Now we move outside. You remember Little Willard?

CHEYENNE

East Coast. Drove a Galaxie. Into Remington over and unders.

HOSS

Yeah. He's changed his style now. Got himself a Lotus Formula 2 and a Baretta.

CHEYENNE

Sounds mean.

HOSS

He is, man. And I trust him. He was right with me when we took off the Dudes. Becky's on the phone to him now. He's our man. Just him and us.

CHEYENNE

But Root Force has probably got Vegas locked up, Hoss. It's gonna be hard penetration.

HOSS

We rolled Phoenix didn't we?

CHEYENNE

Yeah.

HOSS

Tucson?

CHEYENNE

Yeah.

HOSS

San Berdoo?

CHEYENNE

Yeah.

HOSS

So Vegas ain't no Fort Knox.

CHEYENNE

So it's back to the rumble?

HOSS

Temporary. Just temporary. We can't sit back and let the good times roll when the game's breakin' down.

CHEYENNE

I do't know. I love the game, Hoss. I ain't hot to. go back to gang war.

HOSS

We got to now! Otherwise we're down the tubes.

CHEYENNE

What about the Keepers?

HOSS

Fuck them too. We'll take 'em all on.

CHEYENNE

The critics won't like it.

HOSS

The critics! They're outside, man. They don't know what's goin' on.

CHEYENNE

What about our reputation. We worked hard to get where we are. I'm not ready to throw that away. I want a taste a' that gold.

HOSS

I'm surrounded by assholes! Can't you see what's happened to us. We ain't Markers no more. We ain't even Rockers. We're punk chumps cowering under the Keepers and the Refs and the critics and the public eye. We ain't free

no more! Goddamnit! We ain't flyin' in the eye of contempt. We've become respectable and safe. Soft, mushy chewable ass lickers. What's happened to our killer heart. What's happened to our blind fucking courage! Cheyenne, we ain't got much time, man. We were warriors once.

CHEYENNE

That was a long time ago.

HOSS

Then you're backing down?

CHEYENNE

No. I'm just playin' the game.

(CHEYENNE *exits*)

HOSS

God! Goddamnit! This is gettin' weird now. Solo ain't the word for it. It's gettin' lonely as an ocean in here. My driver's gone against me and my time's runnin' thin. Little Willard's my last chance. Him and me. He's runnin' without a driver, so can I. The two of us. Just the two of us. That's enough against the Root Force. He's East Coast though. Maybe he don't know the Western Ropes. He could learn it. We'll cruise the action. He'll pick up the streets. Cheyenne knows the West though. Born and raised like me. Backyard schoolin'. Goddamn! Why's he have to go soft now! Why now!

(BECKY *enters*)

You get Willard?

BECKY LOU

No.

HOSS

How come! I need him bad. Keep tryin'!!

BECKY LOU

He's dead, Hoss. Shot himself in the mouth.

HOSS

Who told you?

BECKY LOU

His Rep. They just found him in New Haven slumped over an intersection. They say his car was still runnin'.

HOSS

Why'd he go and do that? He was in the top ten and risin'.

BECKY LOU

Couldn't take it I guess. Too vulnerable. They found a pound of Meth in the back seat.

HOSS

Becky, I'm marked. What the fuck am I gonna do? I can't just sit here and wait for him to come.

BECKY LOU

Least you'll know he's comin'. If you go out cruisin' he's liable to strike anywhere, any time. A Gypsy's got the jump on you that way.

HOSS

What if I busted into Vegas myself? Just me. They'd never expect somethin' like that. I could take off Mojo and split before they knew what happened.

BECKY LOU

You're dealin' with a pack now, man. It ain't one against one no more.

HOSS

Well what am I gonna do!

BECKY LOU

Wait him out. Meet him on a singles match and bounce him hard. Challenge him.

HOSS

What if he snipes me?

BECKY LOU

We got the watch out. We'll give him the usher routine. Say that you've been expecting him. That'll challenge his pride. Then fight him with shivs.

HOSS

Shivs! I ain't used a blade for over ten years. I'm out of practice.

BECKY LOU

Practice up. I'll get you a set and a dummy.

HOSS

O`K` And call in the Doc. I need a good shot.

BECKY LOU

Good.

(*She exits. HOSS stalks the stage*)

HOSS

Backed into a fucking box. I can't believe it. Things have changed that much. They don't even apprentice no more. Just mark for the big one. No respect no more. When I was that age I'd sell my leathers to get a crack at a good teacher. I would. And I had some a' the best. There's no sense of tradition in the game no more. There's no game. It's just back to how it was. Rolling night clubs, strip joints. Bustin' up poker games. Zip guns in the junk yard. Rock fights, dirt clods, bustin' windows. Vandals, juvies, West Side Story. Can't they see where they're goin'! Without a code it's just crime. No art involved. No technique, finesse. No sense of mastery. The touch is gone.

(*BECKY enters with DOC who is dressed in red. BECKY has two knives and a dummy which she sets up centre stage right. HOSS sits in his chair. DOC has a syringe and a vial of dope and a rubber surgical hose. HOSS rolls his sleeve up and DOC goes about shooting him up.*)

Oh, Doc, it's good to see ya'. I'm in need. I'm under the gun, Doc.

DOC

Yeah. Things are tough now. This'll cool you out.

HOSS

Good. Doc, what do you think about Gypsy Kills. Do you think it's ethical?

DOC

Haven't thought too much about it actually. I suppose it was bound to happen. Once I remember this early Gypsy. I guess you'd call him a Gypsy now but at the time he was just

a hard luck fella name a'Doc Carter. Little got to be known of the man on account a' the fact that he was ridin' a certain William F' Cody's shirttail all through the West, and, for that matter, half around the planet. Anyhow, ole Doc came to be known as the "Spirit Gun of the West" and a well-deserved title it was, too. That boy could shoot the hump off a buffalo on the backside of a nickel at a hundred paces. To this very day his saddle is settin' in some musty ole Wyoming museum decorated with a hundred silver coins. Each one shot through and through with his Colt .45. And all surroundin' this saddle is pictures tall as a man of this William F' Cody fella pallin' it up with the Indians. Ole Doc never got out from behind the shadow a' that Cody. But I suppose nowadays he'd just take over the whole show. Don't rightly know what made me think a' that. Just popped into my mind.

HOSS

Yeah. It's just funny finding myself on the other side.

BECKY LOU

It ain't revolution, man. This Gypsy's a hired trigger from Mojo. He ain't a martyr.

HOSS

But he works outside the code.

BECKY LOU

Fuck it. All you gotta worry about is gettin' him before he gets you.

HOSS

You were one of the ones who taught me the code. Now you can throw it away like that.

BECKY LOU

It's back down to survival, Hoss. Temporary suspension. That's all.

HOSS

I don't think so. I think the whole system's gettin' shot to shit. I think the code's going down the tubes. These are gonna be the last days of honor. I can see it comin'.

DOC

There. That oughta' do you for a while.

HOSS

Thanks, Doc.

DOC

If you need any crystal later just call me down.

HOSS

Thanks, man.

(DOC *exits*)

BECKY LOU

You wanna try these out?

(*She offers the knives to HOSS. He goes limp and relaxed in the chair.*)

HOSS

Not now. Just come and sit with me for a while.

(BECKY *sits at his feet. He strokes her hair.*)

BECKY?

BECKY LOU

Yeah?

HOSS

You remember the El Monte Legion Stadium?

BECKY LOU

Yeah?

HOSS

Ripple Wine?

BECKY LOU

Yeah.

HOSS

The Coasters?

BECKY LOU

(*she sings a snatch*)

"Take out the papers and the trash or you don't get no spendin' cash."

HOSS

(*sings*)

"Just tell your hoodlum friend outside. You ain't got time to take a ride."

BECKY LOU

"Yackety yack."

HOSS

"Don't talk back."

(*They laugh. HOSS stops himself.*)

Don't let me go too soft.

BECKY LOU

Why not. You've earned it.

HOSS

Earned it? I ain't earned nothin'. Everything just happened. Just fell like cards. I never made a choice.

BECKY LOU

But you're here now. A hero. All those losers out there barkin' at the moon.

HOSS

But where am I goin'? The future's just like the past.

BECKY LOU

You gotta believe, Hoss.

HOSS

In what?

BECKY LOU

Power. That's all there is. The power of the machine. The killer Machine. That's what you live and die for. That's what you wake up for. Every breath you take you breathe the power. You live the power. You are the power.

HOSS

Then why do I feel so weak!

BECKY LOU

The knife's gotta be pulled out before you can stab again. The gun's gotta be cocked. The energy's gotta be stored. You're just gettin'a trickle charge now. The ignition's gotta turn yet.

HOSS

Yeah. It's just hard to wait.

BECKY LOU

It's harder for movers. You're a mover, Hoss. Some people, all they do is wait.

HOSS

Maybe I should take a ramble.

BECKY LOU

Where to?

HOSS

Anywhere. Just to get out for a while.

BECKY LOU

You carry your gun wherever you go.

HOSS

Listen, maybe I should go on the lam.

BECKY LOU

Are you crazy?

HOSS

No, I'm serious. I'm gettin' too old for this. I need some peace.

BECKY LOU

Do you know what it's like out there, outside the game? You wouldn't recognize it.

HOSS

What about New York? Second Avenue.

BECKY LOU

What Second Avenue? There ain't no Second Avenue. They're all zoned out. You wouldn't stand a snowball's chance in hell of makin' it outside the game. You're too professional. It'd be like keepin' a wild animal as a pet then turnin' him back loose again. You couldn't cope, Hoss.

HOSS

I did it once. I was good on the streets. I was a true hustler.

BECKY LOU

The streets are controlled by the packs. They got it locked up. The packs are controlled by the gangs. The gangs and the Low Riders. They're controlled by cross syndicates. The next step is the Keepers.

HOSS

What about the country. Ain't there any farmers left, ranchers, cowboys, open space? Nobody just liven' their life.

BECKY LOU

You ain't playin' with a full deck, Hoss. All that's gone. That's old time boogie. The only way to be an individual is in the game. You're it. You're on top. You're free.

HOSS

What free! How free! I'm tearin' myself inside out from this fuckin' sport. That's free? That's being alive? Fuck it. I just wanna have some fun. I wanna be a fuck off again. I don't wanna compete no more.

BECKY LOU

And what about the kill? You don't need that?

HOSS

I don't know, maybe not. Maybe I could live without it.

BECKY LOU

You're talkin' loser now, baby.

HOSS

Maybe so. Maybe I am a loser. Maybe we're all fuckin' losers. I don't care no more.

BECKY LOU

What about the gold record. You don't need that?

HOSS

I don't know! I just wanna back off for a while. I can't think straight. I need a change. A vacation or something.

BECKY LOU

Maybe so. I heard about a place, an island where they don't play the game. Everybody's on downers all day.

HOSS

That sounds good. What about that. Maybe you could find out for me. All I need is a week or two. Just to rest and think things out.

BECKY LOU

I'll see what I can do.

HOSS

Jesus. How'd I get like this?

BECKY LOU

It'll pass.

HOSS

Sing me a song or somethin', would ya? Somethin' to cool me off.

BECKY LOU

O`K`

(*She sings*)

"Becky's Song"

Lemme take you for a ride down the road
Lean back in the tuck and roll
The radio's broken and I got no beer
But I can ease your load
Listen to the song that the V-8 sings
Watch the rhythm of the line
Isn't it some magic that the night-time brings
Ain't the highway fine
Tell me where ya' wanna go just take yer pick
All I'm really doin' is cruisin'
Take ya' down to Baton Rouge — New Orleans
Pick us up a Louisiana trick
Listen to the song that the V-8 sings
Watch the rhythm of the line
Isn't it some magic that the night-time brings
Ain't the highway fine
You could tell me stories of your yesterdays
I could break out a few a' mine
Roll down the window and kiss the wind
Anyway ya' want to ease the time
Listen to the song that the V-8 sings

Watch the rhythm of the line
Isn't it some magic that the night-time brings
Ain't the highway fine

(*The song ends and CHEYENNE enters.*)

CHEYENNE

Say, Hoss. We just got tapped that the Gypsy's made it through zone five. He's headed this way.

HOSS

Already? What's he drivin'?

CHEYENNE

You won't believe this. A '58 black Impala, fuel injected, bored and stroked, full blown Vet underneath.

HOSS

I'm gonna like this dude. O`K` let him through.

CHEYENNE

All the way?

HOSS

Yeah. Stop him at the mote and sound him on a shiv duel.

CHEYENNE

Shivs? You ain't in shape for blades, Hoss.

HOSS

I can handle it. Walk on.

CHEYENNE

O`K`

(*he exits*)

BECKY LOU

Good. He's finally comin'. This'll get ya' back on your feet, Hoss. Your waitin' time is over.

HOSS

Go tell the Doc I want some snow.

BECKY LOU

You want the fit or snort?

HOSS

Snort. Hurry up.

BECKY LOU

Right.

(BECKY exits. HOSS picks up the knives and stalks the dummy. He circles it and talks to the dummy and himself. As he talks he stabs the dummy with sudden violent lunges then backs away again. Blood pours from the dummy onto the floor.)

HOSS

O'K' Gypsy King, where's your true heart. Let's get down now. Let's get down. You talk a good story. You got the true flash but where's yer heart. That's the whole secret. The heart of a Gypsy must be there!

(He stabs at the heart of the dummy then backs off.)

Maybe not. Maybe yer colder than that. Maybe in the neck. Maybe it pumps from the neck down. Maybe there!

(He stabs at the neck then backs off. Blood gushes out.)

All right. All right. A secret's a secret. I can give you that much. But it comes from this end too. I'm your mystery Figure me. Run me down to your experience. Go ahead. Make a move. Put me in a place. An inch is fatal. Just an inch. The wrong move'll leave you murdered. Come on. Lemme see it. Where's the action? That's not good enough for the back lot even. Here's one!

(He makes a quick move and stabs the dummy in the stomach.)

Now I get it. There ain't no heart to a Gypsy. Just bone. Just blind raging courage. Well that won't do you, boy. That won't take you the full length. Yer up against a pro, kid. A true champion Marker. Yer outclassed before the bell rings.

Now you've stepped across the line, boy. No goin' back. Dead on yet feet.

(to himself)

What am I gettin' so wired about? This kid is a punk. It ain't even a contest. He's still ridin' in fifties. Beach Boys behind the eyeballs. A blonde boy. A fair head. Gang bangs, cheap wine and bonfires. I could take him in my sleep. I could. I could —

(BECKY enters with DOC. DOC has a large sheet of foil with mounds of cocaine on it. He sets it down on the chair.)

BECKY LOU

How's it goin'?

HOSS

Something's lacking. I can't seem to get it up like the other kills. My heart's not in it.

DOC

Have some a' this.

(He holds out a rolled up hundred dollar bill. HOSS takes it and goes to the coke.)

HOSS

Yeah. Maybe that'll help.

(He takes the bill and snorts the coke as he talks.)

You know, I been thinkin'. What if the neutral field state failed. One time. Just once.

BECKY LOU

Like this time for instance?

HOSS

Yeah. Like this time.

BECKY LOU

Then you're a gonner.

DOC

It shouldn't fail, Hoss. You've been trained.

HOSS

I know, but what if an emotional field came through stronger.

BECKY LOU

Like love or hate?

HOSS

Not that gross, not that simple. Something subtle like the sound of his voice or a gesture or his timing. Something like that could throw me off.

BECKY LOU

You're really worried about this Gypsy.

HOSS

Not worried. Intrigued. His style is copping my patterns. I can feel it already and he's not even here yet. He's got a presence. Maybe even star quality. His movements have an aura. Even his short. I mean nobody rides a '58 Impala to do battle with a star Marker.

BECKY LOU

He's just a fool.

DOC

You gotta stay disengaged, Hoss. The other way is fatal.

HOSS

Maybe not. Maybe there's an opening. A ground wire.

BECKY LOU

For what. He's come to Knock you over, man.

HOSS

O' K' but I can play in his key. Find his tuning. Jam a little before the big kill. I don't have to off him soon's he walks in the door.

DOC

You'd be better off. He's probably got eyes to work that on you.

HOSS

I don't think so. He's got more class than that. I can feel him coming. We might even be in the same stream. He's got respect.

BECKY LOU

Respect! He's a killer, man.

HOSS

So am I. There's another code in focus here. An outside code. Once I knew this cat in High School who was a Creole. His name was Moose. He was real light skinned and big, curly blond hair, blue eyes. He could pass easy as a jock. Good musician. Tough in football but kinda dumb. Dumb in that way — that people put you down for in High School. Dumb in class. He passed as white until his sister started hangin' around with the black chicks. Then the white kids figured it out. He was black to them even though he looked white. He was a nigger, a coon, a jungle bunny. A Rock Town boy from that day on. We ran together, Moose and me and another cat from Canada who dressed and wore his hair like Elvis. They put him down too because he was too smart. His name was Cruise and he got straight A's without readin' none a ' the books. Slept in a garage with his aunt. Built himself a cot right over an old Studebaker. His mother was killed by his father who drove skidders for a lumber company up near Vancouver. Got drunk and busted her in the head with a tire iron. The

three of us had a brotherhood, a trust. Something unspoken. Then one day it came to the test. I was sorta' ridin' between 'em. I'd shift my personality from one to the other but they dug me' cause I'd go crazy drunk all the time. We all went out to Bob's Big Boy in Pasadena to cruise the chicks and this time we got spotted by some jocks from our High School. Our own High School. There were eight of 'em, all crew cut and hot for blood. This was the old days ya' know. So they started in on Cruise 'cause he was the skinniest. Smackin' him around and pushin' him into the car. We was right in the parking lot there. Moose told 'em to ease off but they kept it up. They were really out to choose Moose. He was their mark. They wanted him bad. Girls and dates started gathering around until we was right in the center of a

huge crowd a' kids. Then I saw it. This was a class war. These were rich white kids from Arcadia who got T-birds and deuce coups for Xmas from Mommy and Daddy. All them cardigan sweaters and chicks with ponytails and pedal pushers and bubble hairdo's. Soon as I saw that I flipped out. I found my strength. I started kickin' shit, man. Hard and fast. Three of 'em went down screamin' and holdin' their balls. Moose and Cruise went right into action. It was like John Wayne, Robert Mitchum and Kirk Douglas all in one movie. Those chumps must a' swung on us three times and that was all she wrote. We had all eight of 'em bleedin' and cryin' for Ma right there in the parking lot at Bob's Big Boy. I'll never forget that. The courage we had. The look in all them rich kids' faces. The way they stepped aside just like they did for "Big John." The three of us had a silent pride. We just walked strong, straight into that fuckin' burger palace and ordered three cherry cokes with lemon and a order a' fries.

DOC

Those were the old days.

HOSS

Yeah. Look at me now. Impotent. Can't strike a kill unless the charts are right. Stuck in my image. Stuck in a mansion. Waiting. Waiting for a kid who's probably just like me. Just like I was then. A young blood. And I gotta off him. I gotta roll him or he'll roll me. We're fightin' ourselves. Just like turnin' the blade on ourselves. Suicide, man. Maybe Little Willard was right. Blow your fuckin' brains out. The whole thing's a joke. Stick a gun in your fuckin' mouth and pull the trigger. That's what it's all about. That's what we're doin'. He's my brother and I gotta kill him. He's gotta kill me. Jimmy Dean was right. Drive the fuckin' Spider till it stings ya' to death. Crack up your soul! Jackson Pollock! Duane Allman! Break it open ! Pull the trigger! Trigger me! Trigger you! Drive it off the cliff! It's all an open highway. Long and clean and deadly beautiful. Deadly and lonesome as jukebox.

DOC

Come on, Becky, let's leave him alone.

HOSS

Yeah. Right. Alone. That's me. Alone. That's us. All fucking alone. All of us. So don't go off in your private rooms with pity in mind. Your day is comin'. The mark'll come down to you one way or the other.

BECKY LOU

You better rest, Hoss.

HOSS

Ya' know, you'd be O'K', Becky, if you had a self. So would I. Something to fall back on in a moment of doubt or terror or even surprise. Nothing' surprises me no more. I'm ready to take it all on. The whole shot.

The big one. Look at the Doc. A slave. An educated slave. Look at me. A trained slave. We're all so pathetic it's downright pathetic. And confidence is just a hype to keep away the open-ended shakes. Ain't that the truth, Doc?

DOC

I don't know.

HOSS

Right. Right. "I don't know" is exactly right. Now beat it, both of ya' before I rip your fuckin' teeth out a' yer heads!! GO ON BEAT IT!!!

(BECKY and DOC exit. HOSS sits in his chair and stares out in front of him. He talks to himself, sometimes shifting voices from his own into an older man's.)

(old)

All right, Hoss, this is me talkin'. Yer old Dad. Yer old fishin' buddy. We used to catch eels side by side down by the dump. The full moon lit up the stream and the junk. The rusty chrome flashin' across the marsh. The fireflies dancin' like a faraway city. They'd swallow the hook all the way down. You remember that?

(himself)

Yeah. Sure.

(old)

O'K' You're not so bad off. It's good to change. Good to feel your blood pump.

(himself)

But where to? Where am I going?

(old)

It don't matter. The road's what counts. Just look at the road. Don't worry about where it's goin'.

(himself)

I feel so trapped. So fucking unsure. Everything's mystery. I had it all in the palm of my hand. The gold, the silver. I knew. I was sure. How could it slip away like that?

(old)

It'll come back.

(himself)

But I'm not a true Marker no more. Not really. They're all countin' on me. The bookies, the agents, the Keepers. I'm a fucking industry. I even affect the stocks and bonds.

(*old*)

You're just a man, Hoss. Just a man.

(*himself*)

Yeah, maybe you're right. I'm just a man.

(CHEYENNE *enters.*)

CHEYENNE

Hoss. He's here.

(HOSS *stays seated, relaxed. He has an air of complete acceptance.*)

HOSS

Good. He's here. That's good. What's his name?

CHEYENNE

He calls himself Crow.

HOSS

Crow. That's a good name. Did you sound him on the duel?

CHEYENNE

Yeah. He's game. He looks tougher than I thought, Hoss.

HOSS

Tough. Tough?

(*he laughs*)

Good. A tough Crow.

CHEYENNE

What'll I tell him?

HOSS

Tell him I like his style. Tell him I'm very tired right now and I'm gonna cop some z's. He can take a swim, have a sauna and a massage, some drinks, watch a movie, have a girl, dope, whatever he wants. Tell him to relax. I'll see him when I come to.

CHEYENNE

O`K` You all right, Hoss?

HOSS

Yeah. Just tired. Just a little tired.

CHEYENNE

O`K`

HOSS

Thanks, man.

CHEYENNE

Sure.

(CHEYENNE exits. HOSS stays seated looking out.)

HOSS

Maybe the night'll roll in. A New Mexico night. All gold and red and blue. That would be nice. A long slow New Mexico night. Put that in your dream, Hoss, and sleep tight. Tomorrow you live or die.

Act 2

ACT TWO

SCENE: The stage is the same. The lights come up on CROW. He looks just like Keith Richard. He wears high-heeled green rock and roll boots, tight greasy blue jeans, a tight yellow t-shirt a green velvet coat, a shark tooth earring, a silver swastika hanging from his neck and a black eye-patch covering the left eye. He holds a short piece of silver chain in his hand and twirls it constantly, tossing it from hand to hand. He chews a stick of gum with violent chomps. He exudes violent arrogance and cruises the stage with true contempt. Sometimes he stops to examine the guns on the floor, or check out the knives and the dummy. Finally he winds up sitting in HOSS'S chair. A pause as he chews gum at the audience. HOSS enters dressed the same as in Act One. CROW doesn't move or behave any different than when he was alone. They just stare at each other for a while.

HOSS

My sleuth tells me you're drivin' a '58 Impala with a Vet underneath.

CROW

Razor, Leathers. Very razor.

HOSS

Did you rest up?

CROW

Got the molar chomps. Eyes stitched. You can vision what's sittin'. Very razor to cop z's sussin' me to be on the far end of the spectrum.

HOSS

It wasn't strategy man. I was really tired. You steal a lotta' energy from a distance.

CROW

No shrewd from this end either. We both bow to bigger fields.

HOSS

You wanna drink or somethin'?

CROW

(he laughs with a cackle)

Lush in sun time gotta smell of lettuce or turn of the century. Sure Leathers, squeeze on the grape vine one time.

HOSS

White or red?

CROW

Blood.

HOSS

Be right back.

CROW

No slaves in this crib?

HOSS

They're all in the pool watching a movie.

CROW

Very Greek.

HOSS

Yeah. Just relax, I'll be right back.

(HOSS exits. CROW gets up and walks around thinking out loud)

CROW

Very razor. Polished. A gleam to the movements. Weighs out in the eighties from first to third. Keen on the left side even though he's born on the right. Maybe forced his hand to change. Butched some instincts down. Work them through his high range. Cut at the gait. Heel-toe action rhythms of New Orleans. Can't suss that particular. That's well covered. Meshing patterns. Easy mistakes here. Suss the bounce.

(CROW tries to copy HOSS'S walk. He goes back and forth across the stage practising different styles until he gets the exact one. It's important that he gets inside the feeling of HOSS'S walk and not just the outer form.)

Too heavy on the toe. Maybe work the shoulders down. Here's a mode. Three-four cut time copped from Keith Moon. Early. Very early. Now. Where's that pattern. Gotta be in the "Happy jack" album. Right around there. Triplets. Six-eight. Here it comes. Battery. Double bass talk. Fresh Cream influence. Where's that? Which track. Yeah. The old Skip James tunes. Question there. Right there.

(sings it)

"I'm so glad, I'm so glad, I'm glad, I'm glad, I'm glad." Yeah. Ancient. Inborn. Has to be a surgery. Grind down.

(He hears HOSS coming and darts back to the chair and sits as though he'd never moved. HOSS enters with a bottle of red wine and two glasses. He hands one to CROW and then he pours himself one and sets the bottle down.)

HOSS

Ya know I had a feeling you were comin' this way. A sense. I was onto a Gypsy pattern early yesterday. Even conjured going that way myself.

CROW

Cold, Leathers. Very icy. Back seat nights. Tuck and roll pillow time. You got fur on the skin in this trunk.

HOSS

Yeah, yeah. I'm just gettin' bored I guess. I want out.

CROW

I pattern a conflict to that line. The animal says no. The blood won't go the route. Re-do me right or wrong?

HOSS

Right I guess. Can't you back the language up, man. I'm too old to follow the flash.

CROW

Choose an argot Leathers. Singles or LPs. 45, 78, 33 1/3.

HOSS

I musta' misfed my data somehow. I thought you were raw, unschoolded. Ya' know? I mean, maybe the

training's changed since my time. Look, I wanna just sound you for a while before we get down to the cut. O`K`? You don't know how lonely it's been. I can talk to Cheyenne but we mostly reminisce on old kills. Ya' know. I don't get new information. I'm starving for new food. Ya' know? That don't mean I won't be game to mark you when the time comes. I don't sleep standin' up. Ya' know what I mean? it's just that I wanna find out what's going on. None of us knows. I'm surrounded by boobs who're still playin' in the sixties. That's where I figured you were. Earlier. I figured you for Beach Boys in fact.

CROW

That sand stayed on the beach with me. You can suss me in detail Leathers. What's your key?

HOSS

This is really weird, me learnin' from you. I mean I can't believe myself admitting it. Ya' know? I thought I could teach you somethin'. I thought you were playin' to the inside. Choosin' me off just to get in the door. I mean I know you must be Mojo's trigger, right?

CROW

De-rail Leathers. you're smokin' the track.

HOSS

Eyes traced a Nevada route. It don't matter. If you ain't from the Root Force you're on the Killin' floor Jack. Anyway you cut it you're a corpse. So let's lay that one on the rack for now. Let's just suspend and stretch it out.

CROW

We can breathe thin or thick. The air is your genius.

HOSS

Good. Now, first I wanna find out how the Gypsy Killers feature the stars. Like me. How do I come off. Are we playin' to a packed house like the Keepers all say?

CROW

(*he cackles*)

Image shots are blown, man. No fuse to match the hole. Only power forces weigh the points in our match.

HOSS

You mean we're just ignored? Nobody's payin' attention?

CROW

We catch debris beams from your set. We scope it to our action then send it back to garbage game.

HOSS

Listen chump, a lotta' cats take this game serious. There's a lotta' good Markers in this league.

CROW

You chose ears against tongue Leathers. Not me, I can switch to suit. You wanna patter on my screen for a while?

HOSS

Sorry. It's just hard to take. If it's true. I don't believe we could be that cut off. How did it happen? We're playing in a vacuum? All these years. All the kills and no one's watching?

CROW

Watching takes a side seat. Outside. The Game hammered the outside.

HOSS

And now you hammer us with fucking indifference! This is incredible. It's just like I thought. The Outside is the Inside now.

CROW

(*he cackles*)

Harrison, Beatle did that ancient. It cuts a thinner slice with us. Roles fall to birth blood. We're star marked and playing inter-galactic modes. Some travel past earthbound and score on Venus, Neptune, Mars.

HOSS

How do you get to fucking Neptune in a '58 Impala!

CROW

How did you get to earth in a Maserati?

HOSS

There! Why'd you slip just then? Why'd you suddenly talk like a person? You're into a wider scope than I thought. You're playin' my time Gypsy but it ain't gonna work. And get the fuck outa' my chair!!

(CROW slides out of the chair and starts walking around, twirling his chain and chomping his gum. HOSS sits down. He sips his wine. Slowly through the dialogue CROW starts to get into HOSS'S walk until he's doing it perfect.)

CROW

Your tappets are knockin' rock-man. I sense an internal smokin' at the seams.

HOSS

Yeah, so this is how you play the game. A style match. I'm beginning to suss the mode. Very deadly but no show. Time is still down to the mark, kid. How's your feel for shivs anyway?

CROW

Breakdown lane. Side a' the road days.

HOSS

Yeah, well that's the way it's gonna be. I ain't used a blade myself for over ten years. I reckon it's even longer for you. Maybe never.

(HOSS begins to switch into a kind of Cowboy-Western image.)

I reckon you ain't never even seen a knife. A pup like you. Up in Utah we'd use yer kind fer skunk bait and throw away the skunk.

CROW

Throwin' to snake-eyes now Leathers.

HOSS

So you gambled your measly grub stake for a showdown with the champ. Ain't that pathetic. I said that before and I'll say it again. Pathetic.

(CROW is getting nervous. He feels he's losing the match. He tries to force himself into the walk. He chews more desperately and twirls the chain faster.)

You young guns comin' up outa' prairie stock and readin' dime novels over breakfast. Drippin' hot chocolate down yer zipper. Pathetic.

CROW

Time warps don't shift the purpose, just the style. You're clickin' door handles now. There'll be more paint on your side than mine.

HOSS

We'd drag you through the street fer a nickel. Naw. Wouldn't even waste the horse. Just break yer legs and leave ya' fer dog meat.

CROW

That's about all you'll get outa' second. Better shift it now Leathers.

(HOSS shifts to 1920s gangster style.)

HOSS

You mugs expect to horn in on our district and not have to pay da' price? Da' bosses don't sell out dat cheap to small-time racketeers. You gotta tow da' line punk or you'll wind up just like Mugsy.

(CROW begins to feel more confident now that he's got HOSS to switch.)

CROW

Good undertow. A riptide invisible moon shot. Very nice slide Leathers.

(HOSS goes back to his own style.)

HOSS

Don't give me that. I had you hurtin'. You were down on one knee Crow Bait. I saw you shakin'.

CROW

Fuel injected. Sometimes the skin deceives. Shows a power ripple. Misconstrued Leathers.

(CROW is into HOSS'S walk now and does it perfect.)

HOSS

You were fish tailin' all over the track meathead! I had you tagged!

CROW

Posi-traction rear end. No pit stops the whole route. Maybe you got a warp in your mirror.

HOSS

There's no fuckin' warp. You were down!

CROW

Sounds like a bad condenser. Points and plugs.

HOSS

Suck ass! I had you clean! And stop walkin' like that! That's not the way you walk! That's the way I walk!

(CROW stops still. They stare at each other for a second. HOSS rises slow.)

All right. I can handle this action but we need a Ref. I ain't playin' unless we score.

CROW

It's your turf.

HOSS

Yeah, and it's stayin' that way. I'm gonna beat you Gypsy. I'm gonna whip you so bad you'll wish we *had* done the shivs. And then I'm gonna send you back with a mark on your forehead. Just a mark that won't never

heal.

CROW

You're crossin' wires now Leathers. My send is to lay you cold. I'll play flat out to the myth but the blood runs when the time comes.

HOSS

We'll see. You're well padded Crow Bait but the layers'll peel like a skinned buck. I'm goin' to get a Ref now. You best use the time to work out. You ain't got your chops down. You're gonna need some sharpening up. When I get back it's head to head till one's dead.

(HOSS exits. The band starts the music to CROW'S song. He sings.)

"Crow's Song"

CROW

What he doesn't know — the four winds blow
Just the same for him as me
We're clutchin' at the straw and no one knows the law
That keeps us lost at sea
But I believe in my mask — The man I made up is me
And I believe in my dance — And my destiny
I coulda' gone the route — of beggin' for my life
Crawlin' on my hands and knees But there ain't no Gods or saviors who'll give you flesh and blood
It's time to squeeze the trigger
But I believe in my mask — The man I made up is me

And I believe in my dance — And my destiny
The killer time — will leave us on the line
Before the cards are dealt
It's a blindman's bluff — without the stuff
To reason or to tell
But I believe in my mask — The man I made up is me
And I believe in my dance — And my destiny

(The song ends. HOSS enters with the REFEREE. He's dressed just like an N`B`A` ref with black pants, striped shirt, sneakers, a whistle, baseball cap and a huge scoreboard which he sets up down right. He draws a big "H" on the top left side of the board and a big "C" on the other. He separates the letters with a line down the middle. As he goes about his business HOSS talks to CROW.)

HOSS

I suppose you wouldn't know what's happened to my people? Becky. Cheyenne, Doc, Star-Man — they're all gone. So's my short.

CROW

Lotsa' force concentration in this spot Leathers. Could be they got bumped out to another sphere. They'll be back when the furnace cools.

HOSS

I don't fancy tap dancers Crow Bait. I like both feet on the ground. Nailed. Joe Frazier mode.

CROW

I vision you brought the rule, man.

HOSS

Yeah. He's gonna see that things stay clean. Points scored and lost on deviation from the neutral field state.

CROW

I'd say you already broke the mercury in round one.

HOSS

That don't count! We start when he's ready.

CROW

I can't cipher why you wanna play this course, Leathers. It's a long way from shivs.

HOSS

Just to prove I ain't outside.

CROW

To me or you?

(HOSS considers for a second but shakes it off.)

HOSS

I don't know how it is with you but for me it's like looking down a long pipe. All the time figurin' that to be the total picture. You take your eye away for a second and see you been gyped.

CROW

"Gyped" — coming from "Gypsy."

(Through all this the REF puts himself through several yoga positions and regulated breathing exercises, cracks his knuckles, shakes his legs out like a track star and runs in place.)

HOSS

I'm gonna have fun skinnin' you.

CROW

If narrow in the eye ball is your handicap then runnin'a gestalt match figures suicidal. Look, Leathers, may be

best to run the blades and forget it.

HOSS

No! You ain't no better than me.

CROW

You smell loser, Leathers. This ain't your stompin' turf.

HOSS

We'll see.

CROW

It took me five seconds to suss your gait. I ran it down to Skip James via Ginger Baker. How long's it gonna take you to cop mine?

HOSS

I ain't a Warlock, I'm a Marker.

CROW

So stick to steel. Pistols. How 'bout the ancient chicken? Maserati against the Chevy. That's fair.

HOSS

I see you turnin' me in. I ain't stupid. I'm stickin' with this route Gypsy and that's what you want so can the horseshit. There's no Marker on the planet can out-kill me with no kinda' weapon or machine. You'd die with the flag still in the air. That's straight on. But too easy. I'm tired of easy marks. I'm drawin' to the flush. I'm gonna leave you paralyzed alive. Amputated from the neck down.

CROW

Just like you.

HOSS

We'll see.

(REF wipes himself off with a towel and tests his whistle.)

REFEREE

All right. Let's get the show on the road. We all know the rules. When the bell rings, come out swingin'. When it rings again go to your corners. No bear hugs, rabbit punches, body pins or holdin' on. If a man goes down we give him five and that's it. After that you can kick the shit out of him. Ready? Let's have it!

(An off-stage bell rings. The band starts slow, low-keyed lead guitar and bass music, it should be a lurking evil sound like the "Sister Morphine" cut on "Sticky Fingers." HOSS and CROW begin to move to the music

not really dancing but feeling the power in their movements through the music. They each pick up microphones. They begin their assaults just talking the words in rhythmic patterns, sometimes going with the music, sometimes counterpointing it. As the round progresses the music builds with drums and piano coming in, maybe a rhythm guitar too. Their voices build so that sometimes they sing the words or shout. The words remain as intelligible as possible like a sort of talking opera.)

Round 1

CROW

Pants down. The moon show. Ass out the window. Belt lash. Whip lash. Side slash to the kid with a lisp. The dumb kid. The loser. The runt. The mutt. The shame kid. Kid on his belly. Belly to the blacktop. Slide on the rooftop. Slide through the parkin' lot. Slide kid. Shame kid. Slide. Slide.

HOSS

Never catch me with beer in my hand. Never caught me with my pecker out. Never get caught. Never once. Never, never. Fast on the hoof. Fast on the roof. Fast through the still night. Faster than the headlight. Fast to the move.

CROW

Catch ya' outa' breath by the railroad track.

HOSS

Never got caught!

CROW

Catch ya' with yer pants down. Whip ya' with a belt. Whup ya' up one side and down to the other. Whup ya' all night long. Whup ya' to the train time. Leave ya' bleedin' and cryin'. Leave ya' cryin' for Ma. All through the night. All through the night long. Shame on the kid. Little dumb kid with a lisp in his mouth. Bleedin' up one side and down to the other.

HOSS

No! Moved to a hard town. Moved in the midnight.

CROW

Comin' in a wet dream. Pissin' on the pillow. Naked on a pillow. Naked in a bedroom. Naked in a bathroom. Beatin' meat to the face in a mirror. Beatin' it raw. Beatin' till the blood come. Pissin' blood on the floor. Hidin' dirty pictures. Hide'em from his Ma. Hide 'em from his Pa. Hide 'em from the teacher.

HOSS

Never did happen! You got a high heel. Step to the lisp. Counter you, never me. Back steppin' Crow Bait. History don't cut it. History's in the pocket.

CROW

The marks show clean through. Look to the guard. That's where it hides. Lurkin' like a wet hawk. Scuffle mark. Belt mark. Tune to the rumble. The first to run. The shame kid. The first on his heel. Shame on the

shame kid. Never live it down. Never show his true face. Last in line. Never face a showdown. Never meet a face-off. Never make a clean break. Long line a' losers.

(All the other characters from Act One come on dressed in purple cheerleader outfits. Each has a pom-pom in one hand and a big card with the word "Victory" printed on it. They do a silent routine, mouthing the word "Victory" over and over and shaking their

pom-poms. They move around the stage doing a shuffle step and stupid routines just like at the football games. CROW and HOSS keep up the battle concentrating on each other. The REF bobs in and out between them, watching their moves closely like a fight ref.)

HOSS

Missed the whole era. Never touched the back seat.

CROW

Coughin' in the corner. Dyin' from phenmonia. Can't play after dinner. Lonely in a bedroom. Dyin' for attention. Starts to hit the small time. Knockin' over pay phones. Rollin' over Beethoven. Rockin' phenmonia. Beboppin' to the Fat Man. Driving' to the small talk. Gotta make his big mark. Take a crack at the teacher. Find him in the can can. There he's doin' time time. Losin' like a wino. Got losin' on his mind. Got losin' all the time.

HOSS

You can't do that!

(At some point the cheerleaders all come downstage in a line, turn their backs on the audience, take their pants down and bend over bare assed. When the bell rings marking the end of the round, they all turn around and show the reverse side of their cards which has the word "Fight" in big letters. Then they all hobble off with their pants around their ankles giggling like school kids.)

CROW

In the slammer he's a useless. But he does his schoolin'. Tries to keep a blind face. Storin' up his hate cells. Thinks he's got it comin'. Bangin' out the street signs. Tryin' to do his time time. Turns into a candy-cock just to get a reprieve. Lost in the long sleeve. Couldn't get a back up. So he takes his lock up. Calls it bitter medicine. Makes a sour face. Gotta pay his dues back. Fakin' like a guru. Finally gets his big chance and sucks the warden's dinger. Gotta be a good boy. Put away the stinger. Put away the gun boy. I'll take away your time. Just gimme some head boy. Just get down on your knees. Gimme some blow boy. I'll give ya' back the key. I'll give ya' back the key boy! Just get down on my thing boy! Just get down! Get on down! Get on down! Get down! Get down! Get down! Come on!

(The bell rings. The music stops. The cheerleaders flash their cards and exit. REF goes to the scoreboard and without hesitation chalks up a big mark for CROW. CROW lies flat on his back and relaxes completely. He looks like he's dead. HOSS paces around nervous.)

HOSS

What the fuck! What the fuck was that!

(*to the* REF)

You call that fair? You're chalkin' that round up to him! On what fucking grounds!

CROW

Good clean body punches. Nice left jab. Straight from the shoulder. Had you rocked on your heels two or three times. No doubt about it.

HOSS

Are you kiddin' me! If flash and intensity is what you want I can give you plenty a' that. I thought we were shootin' honest pool. This kid's a fuckin' fish man. Nothin' but flash. No heart. Look at him. Wasted on his back and I'm still smokin'.

CROW

(*looking at his watch*)

Better get some rest. You got thirty seconds left.

HOSS

I don't need rest. I'm ready to rock. It's him that's stroked out on the fuckin' floor, not me. Look at him. How can you give him the round when he's in that kinda' shape.

REFEREE

Good clean attack.

HOSS

Clean! You call that clean? He was pickin' at a past that ain't even there. Fantasy marks. Like a dog scratchin' on ice. I can play that way if I was a liar. The reason I brought you into this match was to keep everything above the table. How can you give points to a liar.

REFEREE

I don't. I give 'em to the winner.

(*The bell rings. CROW jumps to his feet. The band strikes a note. HOSS steps in. He speaks to the band.*)

HOSS

All right look. Can the music. This ain't Broadway. Let's get this down to the skinny.

REFEREE

What's going on! Play the round!

HOSS

What'sa matter, Crowbait? Afraid to do it naked? Drop the echo stick and square me off.

CROW

You should be past roots on this scale, Leathers. Very retrograde.

HOSS

Don't gimme that. I wanna strip this down to what's necessary.

CROW

(*laughing*)

Necessity?

REFEREE

This is against the code. Either play this round or it's no match.

CROW

We'll walk this dance so long as sounds can push round three. Certain muscles have gone green on me, Leathers. You can cipher.

(*The bell rings again. HOSS and CROW put down their mikes slowly and deliberately as though they both had knives and agreed instead to wrestle. REF moves around them. The band remains quiet.*)

Round Two

HOSS

(*talking like an ancient delta blues singer*)

Chicago. Yeah, well I hear about all that kinda 'lectric machine gun music. All that kinda 'lectric shuffle, you dig? I hear you boys hook up in the toilet and play to da mirror all tru the night.

CROW

(*nervously*)

Yeah. Well, you know, twelve bars goes a long way.

HOSS

(*growing physically older*)

It come down a long way. It come down by every damn black back street you can move sideways through. 'Fore that even it was snakin' thru rubber plants. It had Cheetahs movin' to its rhythm. You dig?

CROW

Yeah. Sure. It's a matter a' course.

(*CROW moves to get away from him as HOSS becomes a menacing ancient spirit. Like a voodoo man.*)

HOSS

Yo' "yeah" is tryin' to shake a lie, boy. The radio's lost the jungle. You can't hear that space 'tween the radio and the jungle.

CROW

It's in my blood. I got genius.

HOSS

Fast fingers don't mean they hold magic. That's lost to you, dude. That's somethin' sunk on another continent and I don't mean Atlantis. You can dig where the true rhymes hold down. Yo' blood know that if nothin' else.

CROW

Blood. Well listen, I need some spray on my callouses now and then, but it's not about endurance.

HOSS

Ha! Yo lost dew claw. Extra weight. You ain't come inside the South. You ain't even opened the door. The brass band contain yo' world a million times over.

CROW

Electricity brought it home. Without juice you'd be long forgot.

HOSS

Who's doin' the rememberin'? The fields opened up red in Georgia, South Carolina. A moan lasted years back then. The grey and blue went down like a harvest and what was left?

CROW

That scale hung itself short.

HOSS

What was left was the clarinet, the bass drum, the trumpet. The fixin's for a salad. All hung gold and black in the

pawnshop window. All them niggers with their hollers hangin' echoes from the fields. All the secret messages sent through a day a' blazin' work.

CROW

I can't do nothing about that. I'm in a different time.

HOSS

And what brought their heads up off the cement? Not no Abraham Lincoln. Not no Emancipation. Not no John Brown. It was the gold and black behind them windows. The music of somethin' inside that no boss man could touch.

CROW

I touch down here, Leathers. Bring it to now.

HOSS

You'd like a free ride on a black man's back.

CROW

I got no guilt to conjure! Fence me with the present.

HOSS

But you miss the origins, milk face. Little Brother Montgomery with the keyboard on his back. The turpentine circuit. Piano ringin' through the woods. Back then you get hung you couldn't play the blues. Back when the boogie wasn't named and every cat house had a professor. Hookers movin' to the ivory tinkle. Diplomats and sailors gettin' laid side by side to the blues. Gettin' laid so bad the U'S Navy have to close down Storyville. That's how the move began. King Oliver got Chicago talkin' New Orleans, Ma Rainey, Blind Lemon Jefferson. They all come and got the gangsters hoppin'.

CROW

I'm a Rocker, not a hick!

HOSS

You could use a little cow flop on yer shoes, boy. Yo' music's in yo' head. You a blind minstrel with a phoney shuffle. You got a wound gapin' 'tween the chords and the pickin'. Chuck Berry can't even mend you up. You doin' a pantomime in the eye of a hurricane. Ain't even got the sense to signal for help. You lost the barrelhouse, you lost the honkey-tonk. You lost your feelings in a suburban country club the first time they ask you to play "Risin' River Blues" for the debutante ball. You ripped your own self off and now all you got is yo' poison to call yo' gift. You a punk chump with a sequin nose and you'll need more'n a Les Paul Gibson to bring you home.

(REF *blows his whistle.*)

REFEREE

Hold it, hold it, hold it!

(HOSS *snaps back to himself.*)

HOSS

What's wrong?

REFEREE

I don't know. Somethin's funny. Somethin's outa whack here. We'll call this one a draw.

HOSS

A draw!

REFEREE

I can't make heads or tails outa this.

HOSS

I had him cut over both eyes!

REFEREE

We leave it. Let's get on with round 3.

HOSS

Look at him! He's unconscious standin' up.

REFEREE

Play the round!

(The bell rings. CROW jumps into action, dancing like Muhammad Ali. HOSS moves flatfooted trying to avoid him. CROW is now on the offensive. The music starts again.)

Round 3.

CROW

So ya' wanna be a rocker. Study the moves. Jerry Lee Lewis. Buy some blue suede shoes. Move yet head like Rod Stewart. Put yer ass in a grind. Talkin' sock it to it, get the image in line. Get the image in line boy. The fantasy rhyme. It's all over the streets and you can't buy the time. You can't buy the bebop. You can't buy the slide. Got the fantasy blues and no place to hide.

HOSS

O'K', this time I stay solid. You ain't suckin' me into jive rhythms. I got my own. I got my patterns. Original. I'm my own man. Original. I stand solid. It's just a matter of time. I'll wear you to the bone.

CROW

Collectin' the South. Collectin' the blues. Flat busted in Chicago and payin' yer dues.

HOSS

Kick it out fish face! This time you bleed!

(REF blows his whistle. The music stops.)

REFEREE

(to HOSS)

No clinches. This ain't a wrestlin' match.

HOSS

I was countering.

REFEREE

Just keep daylight between ya'. Let's go.

(*The music starts again. HOSS goes back to the offense.*)

HOSS

(*to REF*)

I was countering, man!

CROW

Ain't got his chops yet but listens to Hendrix. Ears in the stereo lappin' it up. Likes snortin' his horses too chicken to fix. Still gets a hard on but can't get it up.

HOSS

Backward tactics! I call a foul!

(*REF blows his whistle again.*)

REFEREE

No stalls. Keep it movin'. Keep it movin'.

HOSS

I call a foul. He can't shift in midstream.

REFEREE

Let's go, let's go.

HOSS

He can't do that!

(*REF blows his whistle again. The music comes up.*)

CROW

Can't get it sideways walkin' the dog. Tries trainin' his voice to sound like a frog. Sound like a Dylan, sound like a Jagger, sound like an earthquake all over the Fender. Wearin' a shag now, looks like a fag now. Can't

get it together with chicks in the mag. Can't get it together for all of his tryin'. Can't get it together for fear that he's dyin'. Fear that he's crackin' busted in two. Busted in three parts. Busted in four. Busted and dyin' and cryin' for more. Busted and bleedin' all over the floor. All bleedin' and wasted and tryin' to score.

(REF *blows his whistle.*)

HOSS

What the fuck's wrong now?

REFEREE

I'm gonna have to call that a T`K`O`

HOSS

Are you fuckin' crazy?

REFEREE

That's the way I see it. The match is over.

HOSS

I ain't even started to make my move yet!

REFEREE

Sorry.

(HOSS lets loose a blood-curdling animal scream and runs to one of the pistols on the floor, picks it up and fires, emptying the gun into the REF. REF falls dead. HOSS should be out of control then snap himself back. He just stands there paralyzed and shaking.)

CROW

Now the Keepers'll be knockin' down your hickory, Leathers.

HOSS

Fuck 'em. Let 'em come. I'm a Gypsy now. Just like you.

CROW

Just like me?

HOSS

Yeah. Outside the game.

CROW

And into a bigger one. You think you can cope?

HOSS

With the Gypsies? Why not. You could teach me. I could pick it up fast.

CROW

You wanna be like me now?

HOSS

Not exactly. Just help me into the style. I'll develop my own image. I'm an original man. A one and only. I just need some help.

CROW

But I beat you cold. I don't owe you nothin'.

HOSS

All right. Look. I'll set you up with a new short and some threads in exchange for some lessons.

CROW

No throw Leathers.

HOSS

I'll give ya' all my weapons and throw in some dope. How's that?

CROW

Can't hack it.

HOSS

All right, what do you want? Anything. It's all yours.

(CROW pauses)

CROW

O'K' This is what I want. All your turf from Phoenix to San Berdoo clear up to Napa Valley and back. The whole shot. That's what I want.

(HOSS pauses for a while, stunned. Then a smile of recognition comes over him.)

HOSS

Now I get it. I should cut you in half right now. I shoulda' slit yer throat soon's you came through the door. You must be outa' yer fuckin' cake man! All my turf?! You know how long it's taken me to collect that

ground. You know how many kills it's taken! I'm a fuckin' champion man. Not an amateur. All my turf! That's all I got.

CROW

Yer throwin' away yer reputation, so why not give me yer turf. You got nothin' to lose. It won't do you no good once the Keepers suss this murder.

HOSS

I still got power. The turf is my power. Without that I'm nothin'. I can survive without the image, but a Marker without no turf is just out to lunch.

CROW

I thought you wanted to cop Gypsy style.

HOSS

I do but I need my turf!

CROW

The Gypsies float their ground, man. Nobody sets up colors.

HOSS

You want it bad enough. What's a' matter with you. You movin' outa' Gypsy ranks?

CROW

Razor Leathers.

HOSS

Wait a minute. You tricked me. You wanna trade places with me? You had this planned right from the start.

CROW

Very razor. An even trade. I give you my style and I take your turf.

HOSS

That's easy for you and hard for me.

CROW

You got no choice.

HOSS

I could just move out like I am and keep everything. I could make it like that.

CROW

Try it.

HOSS

You got it all worked out don't ya, fish face? You run me through a few tricks, take everything I got and send me out to die like a chump. Well I ain't fallin' for it.

CROW

Then what're you gonna do?

HOSS

I'll think a' somethin'. What if we teamed up? Yeah! That's it! You, me and Cheyenne. We start a Gypsy pack.

CROW

I'm a solo man. So are you. We'd do each other in. Who'd be the leader?

HOSS

We don't need a leader. Cheyenne could be the leader.

CROW

Not on my time. Rip that one up, Leathers.

HOSS

How did this happen? This ain't the way it's supposed to happen. Why do you wanna be like me anyway. Look at me. Everything was going so good. I had everything at my fingertips. Now I'm outa' control. I'm pulled and pushed around from one image to another. Nothin' takes a solid form. Nothin' sure and final. Where do I stand! Where the fuck do I stand!

CROW

Alone, Leathers.

HOSS

Yeah, well I guess I don't got your smarts. That's for sure. You played me just right. Sucked me right into it. There's nothin' to do but call ya'. All right. The turf's yours. The whole shot. Now show me how to be a man.

CROW

A man's too hard, Leathers. Too many doors to that room. A Gypsy's easy. Here, chew on some sap.

(*He hands HOSS a stick of gum. HOSS chews it in a defeated way.*)

Bite down. Chew beyond yourself. That's what ya' wanna shoot for. Beyond. Walk like ya' got knives on ye heels. Talk like a fire. The eyes are important. First you gotta learn yer eyes. Now look here. Look in my eyes. Straight out.

(HOSS stands close to CROW'S face and looks in his eyes. CROW stares back.)

No! Yer lookin' in. Back at yourself. You gotta look out. Straight into me and out the back a' my head. Like my eyes were tunnels goin' straight through to daylight. That's better. More. Cut me in half. Get mean. There's too much pity, man. Too much empathy. That's not the target. Use yer eyes like a weapon. Not defensive. Offensive. Always on the

offense. You gotta get this down. You can paralyze a mark with a good set of eyes.

HOSS

How's that?

CROW

Better. Get down to it. Too much searchin'. I got no answers. Go beyond confidence. Beyond loathing. Just kill with the eyes. That's it. That's better. Now. How do you feel?

HOSS

Paralyzed.

CROW

That'll change. The power'll shift to the other side. Feel it?

HOSS

No.

CROW

It'll come. Just hang in there. Feel it now?

HOSS

No. Can I blink now?

CROW

Yeah. Give 'em a rest.

(HOSS blinks his eyes and moves away.)

It'll come. You gotta practice like a musician. You don't learn all yer licks in one session. Now try out yer walk. Start movin' to a different drummer man. Ginger Baker's burned down. Get into Danny Richmond, Sonny Murray, Tony Williams. One a' them cats. More Jazz licks. Check out Mongo Santamaria, he might get yer heels burnin'.

(HOSS starts moving awkwardly around the stage.)

HOSS

I never heard a' them guys.

CROW

O`K` pick one. Any one. Pick one ya' like.

HOSS

Capaldi.

CROW

Too clean man. Try out Ainsley Dunbar. Nice hot licks. Anyone that gets the knife goin'. You gotta slice blacktop man. Melt asphalt.

HOSS

Keith Moon.

CROW

Too mush flash. Get off the cymbals. Stop flyin' around the kit. Get down to it. Get down.

HOSS

Buddy Miles.

CROW

Just loud, man. Blind strength but no touch.

HOSS

Let's go on to somethin' else.

CROW

O`K` Body moves. Do a few chick moves. Fluff up yer feathers. Side a' the head shots. Hand on the hip. Let the weight slide to one side. Straight leg and the opposite bent. Pull on yer basket.

(HOSS tries to follow. CROW acts out all the gestures with a slick cool.)

Spit out yer teeth. Ear pulls. Nose pulls. Pull out a booger. Slow scratches from shoulder to belly. Hitch up yer shirt. Sex man. Tighten your ass. Tighten one cheek and loosen the other. Play off yer thighs to yer calves. Get it all talkin' a language.

HOSS

Slow down! I ain't a fuckin' machine.

CROW

Yer gettin' it. Yer doin' O'K' It's comin'. Talk to yer blood. Get it together. Get it runnin' hot on the left side and cold on the right. Now split it. Now put it in halves. Get the top half churnin', the bottom relaxed. Control, Leathers. Ya' gotta learn control. Pull it together.

HOSS

I'm not prepared. I can't just plunge into this. I gotta have some preliminaries.

CROW

O'K' You're right. Tell ya' what. Sit down in the chair and relax. Just take it easy. Come on.

HOSS

Maybe I'm too old.

CROW

Come on, just sit yerself down.

(HOSS sits in the chair. CROW paces around him.)

We gotta break yer patterns down, Leathers. Too many bad habits. Re-program the tapes. Now just relax. Start breathin' deep and slow. Empty your head. Shift your attention to immediate sounds. The floor. The space around you. The sound of your heart. Keep away from fantasy. Shake off the image. No pictures just pure focus. How does it feel?

HOSS

I don't know. Different I guess.

CROW

Just ease down. Let everything go.

(BECKY comes on down left facing the audience. She wears a black wig and is dressed like Anna Karina in "Alphaville." She caresses herself as though her hands were a man's, feeling her tits, her thighs, her waist. Sometimes when one hand seems to take too much advantage she seizes it with the other hand and pushes it away. HOSS seems to turn into a little boy.)

HOSS

You won't let nobody hurt me will ya'?

CROW

Nobody's gonna hurt ya'.

HOSS

Where have I been. All this time. No memory. I was never there.

(BECKY *talks straight out to the audience. But directs it at HOSS.*)

BECKY LOU

I never knew you were that kind of a guy. I thought you were nice. A nice guy. I never thought you'd be like the others. Why do you do that? You know I'm not that kind of a girl. Come on. I just wanna talk. I wanna have a conversation. Tell me about yourself. Come on. Don't do that. Can't we just talk or something. All right, I wanna go then. Take me home. Come on. Let's go get a Coke. Come on. I mean it. Don't do that! Don't!

(*Her hands pull off her sweater. The wig comes off with it. She's wearing a stiff white bra underneath. She struggles against her hands then lets them go then struggles again.*)

Can't we go back? I'm going to be late. Can't we just kiss? No! Don't! Come on. I don't wanna do this. I'm not that kind of a girl. Look, just keep your hands off! I mean it. I don't like it. I just wanna talk. Tell me something nice.

(*Her hands rip off her bra and feel her tits.*)

Just talk to me, Tell me about your car. What kind of an engine has it got? Come on. Don't! Do you go racing a lot? Don't you take it down to the strip. No! Don't do that! Has it got overhead lifters. I really like those fat tires. They're really boss. Cut it out! No! Stop it! Don't!

(*Her hands unzip her skirt and tear it off. One hand tries to get inside her panties while the other hand fights it off.*)

I don't go all the way. I can't. I've never ever gone this far before. I don't wanna go all the way. I'm not that kind of a girl. I'll get pregnant. Stop it! All right, just get away from me! Get away! I'm getting out. Let me outa' the car! Let me out! Don't! Let go of me! Let go!

(*she starts screaming*)

Let me out! Let me out! Let me out! Let me out!

(*She picks up her clothes and runs off.*)

CROW

How is it now?

HOSS

I don't know. Trapped. Defeated. Shot down.

CROW

Just a wave. Time to scoop a Gypsy shot. Start with a clean screen. Are you blank now?

HOSS

I guess.

CROW

Good. Now vision him comin'. Walking towards you from a distance. Can't make out the face yet. Just feel his form. Get down his animal. Like a cat. Lethal and silent. Comin' from far off. Takin' his time. Pull him to ya'. Can you feel him?

HOSS

I think so. It's me. He's just like me only younger. More dangerous. Takes bigger chances. No doubt. No fear.

CROW

Keep him comin'. Pull him into ya'. Put on his gestures. Wear him like a suit a' clothes.

HOSS

Yeah. It *is* me. Just like I always wanted to be.

(The band starts playing the first two chords to "Slips Away." CHEYENNE, STAR-MAN, DOC and GALACTIC JACK come on dressed in white tuxedos with pink carnations in their lapels. They stand in a tight group and sing harmony notes to the music. They move in perfect choreographed movements like the old a capella bands. The music should build slowly with HOSS'S voice until he stops talking and the SINGERS go right into the song.)

Mean and tough and cool. Untouchable. A true killer. Don't take no shit from nobody. True to his heart. True to his voice. Everything's whole and unshakeable. His eyes cut through the jive. He knows his own fate. Beyond doubt. True courage in every move. Trusts every action to be what it is. Knows where he stands. Lives by a code. His own code. Knows something timeless. Unending trust in himself. No hesitation. Beyond pride or modesty. Speaks the truth without trying. Can't do anything false. Lived out his fantasies. Plunged into fear and come out the other side. Died a million deaths. Tortured and pampered. Holds no grudge. No blame. No guilt.Laughs with his whole being. Passed beyond tears. Beyond ache for the world. Pitiless. Indifferent and riding a state of grace. It ain't me! IT AIN'T ME! IT AIN'T ME! IT AIN'T ME!!

(He collapses in a ball and holds himself tight. The FOUR GUYS sing.)

"Slips Away"

FOUR GUYS

I saw my face in yours — I took you for myself
I took you by mistake — for me
I learned your walk and talk — I learned your mouth
I learned the secrets in your eye

But now I find the feelin' slips away
What's with me night and day is gone
Where you left off and I begin
It took me time to break the line
And on your own is tough enough
Without the thread that we got broken
But now I find the feelin' slips away
What's with me night and day is gone
If we could signify from far away
Just close enough to get the touch
You'd find your face in mine
And all my faces tryin' to bring you back to me
But now I find the feelin' slips away
What's with me night and day is gone

(*repeat chorus*)

(*The song ends. The FOUR GUYS exit.*)

CROW

Hey, Leathers. Come on man it's time to cope. Get ready to bop. The world's waitin'.

(HOSS *doesn't move.*)

Leathers, you gotta move out to it now. I taught ya' all I know. Now it's up to you. You got the power.

(HOSS *rises holding the gun in his hand.*)

HOSS

In the palm a' my hand. I got the last say.

CROW

That's it. Get ready to roll. You're gonna knock 'em dead.

HOSS

Knock 'em dead.

CROW

Yeah. What about it.

HOSS

You know somethin' Crow? I really like you. I really have respect for you. You know who you are and you don't give a shit.

CROW

Thanks, Leathers.

HOSS

I just hope you never see yourself from the outside. Just a flash of what you're really like. A pitiful flash.

CROW

Like you?

HOSS

Like me.

CROW

No chance, Leathers. The image is my survival kit.

HOSS

Survival. Yeah. You'll last a long time Crow. A real long time. You're a master adapter. A visionary adapter.

CROW

Switch to suit, Leathers, and mark to kill.

HOSS

Tough as a blind man.

CROW

Tough enough to beat the champ.

HOSS

Yeah. You win all right. All this. Body and soul. All this invisible gold. All this collection of torture. It's all yours. You're the winner and I'm the loser. That's the way it stands. But I'm losin' big, Crow Bait. I'm losin' to the big power. All the way. I couldn't take my life in my hands while I was alive but now I can take it in death. I'm a born Marker Crow Bait. That's more than you'll ever be. Now stand back and watch some true style. The mark of a lifetime. A true gesture that won't never cheat on itself 'cause it's the last of its kind. It can't be taught or copied or stolen or sold. It's mine. An original. It's my life and my death in one clean shot.

(HOSS turns his back to the audience. And puts the gun in his mouth. He raises one hand high in the air and pulls the trigger with the other. He falls in a heap. This gesture should not be in slow motion or use any jive theatrical gimmicks other than the actor's own courage on stage. To save the actor's face from powder burns an off-stage gun should be fired at the right moment. CROW stands silent for a while.)

CROW

Perfect, Leathers. Perfect. A genius mark. I gotta hand it to ya'. It took ya' long enough but you slid right home.

(*he calls off stage*)

All right! Let's go!

(BECKY and CHEYENNE *enter, dressed like they were in Act One.*)

Becky, get some biceps to drag out these stiff. Get the place lookin' a little decent. We're gonna have us a celebration.

BECKY LOU

I had a feeling you'd take him. Was it hard?

CROW

Yeah. He was pretty tough. Went out in the old style. Clung right up to the drop.

BECKY LOU

He was a good Marker man. One a' the great ones.

CROW

Not great enough.

BECKY LOU

I guess not.

(*She exits. CROW talks to CHEYENNE who eyes him.*)

CROW

You eye me bitter wheel-boy. What's the skinny?

CHEYENNE

I guess you want me to drive for you now.

CROW

Maybe I hear you're the top handler in the gold circuit.

CHEYENNE

You hear good.

CROW

I cipher you turnin' sour through. Suicidal like the master. I don't fashion goin' down to a Kami-Kazi collision just after I knock the top.

CHEYENNE

You're cuttin' me loose?

CROW

That's it.

CHEYENNE

You got big shoes to fill Gypsy. They'll be comin' for you next.

CROW

Naw. That's fer lames. I'm throwin' the shoes away. I'm runnin' flat out to a new course.

CHEYENNE

(*looking at HOSS'S body*)

He was knockin' at the door. He was right up there. He came the long route. Not like you. He earned his style. He was a Marker. A true Marker.

CROW

He was backed up by his own suction, man. Didn't answer to no name but loser. All that power goin' backwards. It's good he shut the oven. If he hadn't he'd be blowin' poison in non-directions. I did him a favor. Now the power shifts and sits till a bigger wind blows. Not in my life run but one to come. And all the ones after that. Changin' hands like a snake dance to heaven. This is my time Cowboy and I'm runnin' it up the middle. You best grab your ticket and leave the Maserati with the keys.

CHEYENNE

Sure.

(*He reaches in his pocket and pulls out the keys to the car.*)

Good luck.

(*He throws the keys at CROW'S feet and exits. CROW smiles, bends down slowly and picks up the keys. He tosses them in his hand. The band starts the music. CROW sings "Rollin' Down."*)

"Rollin' Down"

CROW

Keep me rollin' down

Keep me rollin' down

Keep me in my state a' grace

Just keep me rollin' down

I've fooled the Devil's hand

I've fooled the Ace of Spades

I've called the bluff in God's own face
Now keep me from my fate
If I'm a fool then keep me blind
I'd rather feel my way
If I'm a tool for a bigger game
You better get down — you better get down and pray
Just keep me rollin' down
Keep me rollin' down
Keep me in my state a' grace
Just keep me rollin' down.

(*The song ends. The lights go to black.*)